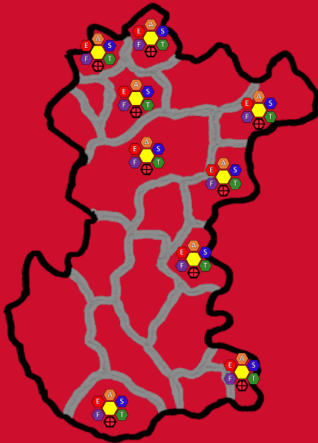




New Places For New People FEAST Update

“Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”



This, the last line of the film Casablanca, is where I and FEAST start this report as in the weeks and months that followed my induction at Synod, I have spent time visiting communities, churches, and circuits listening to the many stories of friendships that ‘the people called Methodist’ are involved with and in across our district.

Over this period a number of touch points have been made, varying from introductory meetings at Church Councils, Circuit Leadership Team meetings, Fellowship Lunches, offering preaching cover to invitations to lead FEAST focused worship, both within local and circuit services as well as the opportunity to accompany circuits as they explore their vision, and to share ideas and opportunities in times of transition.

Clarifying the Vision – Data Mapping

The map to the right shows where FEAST conversations have been explored and shared with local congregations, providing a starting point for the seeking of ideas using the following questions

Can you identify any groups/organisations that you (or your building) may already be on friendly terms with?

The highest number of responses are for the various support groups that are held by both church and ‘outside’ organisations including Grief Counselling, Warm Spaces, Mental Health, Homeless Shelters followed by Church Fellowship groups – Knit and Natter, Tea and Talk events etc and then those more broader events like Coffee Mornings, Church Meals

What topics (including faith) might they be looking to explore?

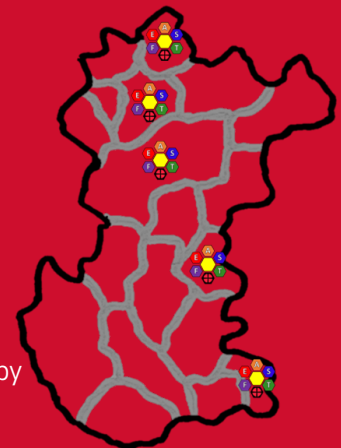
These responses here had the highest variation (dare I suggest a whole Way of Life) ranging from prayer and community issues, what might justice look like in light of local/global news headlines, how to share life stories alongside scripture, and how to know that you belong.

As you consider your own interests and hobbies; how (and where) might FEAST help you to share God’s love with those who identify as ‘spiritual but not religious’?

A high number of responses featured creative activities in some way, craft, drama, art etc whilst others were more active like walking, cycling etc

What events take place within the local community, what activity / connection might a FEAST pilot group make?

A lot of the suggested activities featured food in some form or another, whilst others looked at ways in which things like community events – fundays, charity events, and seasonal events might be a good starting place to begin building friendships.





New Places For New People FEAST Update

Where possible small groups that have been identified

In Melton Mowbray, discernment was already underway about a possible group being formed for those with a learning disability, and FEAST: Fellowship will begin meeting monthly at Granby House (which is home to one of the group members) and is being facilitated by Jenny Petchey, Mary Mason and Linda Flint with the aim of being a Bible based Christian fellowship group for people with a learning disability.

At Loughborough FEAST conversations are underway with Superintendent Rev Karen Beecham about developing the links between the students living in halls of residence across the road at Trinity Methodist Church.

Locally, and personally I am hoping to be able to build on the work of the warm spaces / Here4U / making connections etc within the East Mercia Circuit as lead for a possible FEAST: Craft group or groups. The hope is to be able to launch at least one group during Lent, following the Unbounded Love lent resources (of which I have contributed one of the videos.)

Within the Peterborough circuit conversations and discernment is being held at BOB (Back of Beyond at Westgate) Elton and Whittlesey.

At Leicester West, Circuit Mission Enabler Justin Moulder is interested in not only seeing how FEAST might be a help in building a Christian presence at the Men's Shed, but also how FEAST might be an encouragement to the churches around the circuit both within his role and as he leads worship on Sundays.

A recent meeting with the Safeguarding team has led to a refinement to the role description of the FEAST Facilitator, and a question regarding overall oversight remains – it is highly likely that each agreement will need to be adapted between FEAST and/or the person in pastoral charge depending on the level of involvement they wish to undertake with the group.

It was a joy to work in conjunction with the Connexional Advent campaign Out of The Ordinary and we welcomed 28 people across the district into our zoom planning and idea session – the hope is to continue this work for Advent and Christmas 2024. Another joy was when contacting the steward at Leicester Trinity she said over the phone “Oh, you're the FEAST lady” as she and a number are using the Prayer Handbook as part of their prayer meeting.

Within the Nene Valley circuit Wendy Sturgess, member at Wellingborough Methodist Church, is continuing the work started as part of the FEAST pilots. FEAST: Creative Mindfulness spent Advent slow stitching alongside the words of Advent hymns and carols – and in the coming months will be looking at the Lenten Themes using the Communion Service (recognising that the language can be tricky for those not used to it, so it is a bit of an experiment.)

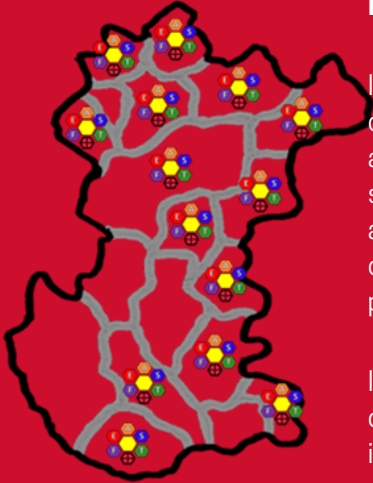
In her latest update, she writes “It has been a joy and a privilege to have witnessed one of our ‘seekers’ dive in and ask anything and come to a greater understanding. It was even more of a joy to be by her side at our Christmas Eve service when she had what she calls her ‘Epiphany’ moment.”





New Places For New People FEAST Update

Looking to the future



In the coming months FEAST will continue to make, build and strengthen connections through events such as the Renew gatherings, preaching appointments (both at local and circuit level), study and idea days, visits etc so that community groups, churches and circuits might have the confidence and encouragement begin to explore how the spring/summer may offer the opportunities and events (fundays, parkruns, fayres,) to begin a Pilot programme.

If the members of this executive spot any opportunities with their own context it would wonderful to engage in further conversations, receive invitations to preach etc.

The District NPNP Oversight Funding process has been completed and is being presented to the Connexional Mission Committee. This strategy route aims to streamline some of the funding process via the District Small Grant Team or the District Grant Team in receiving and reviewing Circuit's NPNP submissions (including stories of their context, learning/elevations from pilots) before making a recommendation to the District Executive.

The arrival of Naomi as District Digital Enabler offers FEAST the opportunity to be excited by, and engaged in, the online places. The development of a FEAST:Online group could be a fruitful collaboration between the district and those churches and circuits that are already sharing lives and faith online.

We are aiming to take a team of 4 (myself +3) to the November Faith Rooted Community Organising course held at Cliff College (to date we have 2)

This report began with the end of a film quote, and it ends with the opening lyrics from the TV Show The Golden Girls, as I take this opportunity to acknowledge your continued prayers and support of FEAST (and the vision behind it) which is seeking to create a district that discovers, supports and nurtures New Places for New People alongside our Established Churches and Established Congregations.

**'Thank you for being a friend
Traveled down a road and back again
Your heart is true, you're a pal and a confidant'**

